TRICYCLE delivery driver Shahjahan Fakir speaks about an election without the Awami League that shaped the political lives for decades in Gopalganj — the ancestral region of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.—AFP

A peaceful start to electioneering

Editorial — The Daily Star (Bangladesh)

THE peaceful beginning of the campaign for the 13th parliamentary election is an encouraging sign, particularly given our troubled electoral history. The first two days of electioneering passed without major violence or disorder, with political parties and candidates launching rallies, door-to-door outreach, and digital campaigns. After years of one-sided polls and widespread public disillusionment, this election represents the first truly competitive contest in more than a decade.

Candidates from major parties — BNP, JI, NCP, Islami Andolan, Ganotantrik Juktafront, and others — visited voters, held rallies, and announced their platforms. The EC has urged strict adherence to the electoral code of conduct. Yet, reports from the very first day of campaigning point to breaches of the rules. Despite a landmark legal reform banning all types of posters, they have already appeared in some areas.

Similarly, while only biodegradable materials are permitted for banners and festoons, non-degradable materials such as plastic and polythene are being used openly in the capital and elsewhere. Loudspeaker campaigning, though regulated by strict time limits, has also raised questions about compliance. Individually, these may appear to be minor breaches, but collectively they signal a lack of discipline — and, more importantly, a lack of deterrence.

Muscle power and money have long played a prominent role in our politics. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) reports that this election will feature the highest-ever number of candidates with assets exceeding Tk 1 crore, including 27 aspirants declaring movable and immovable assets of Tk 100 crore or more. The EC must rigorously examine affidavit disclosures, verify any inconsistencies, and coordinate with oversight bodies to ensure that wealth and influence do not undermine the democratic process.

As political competition is intense, accusations and counter-accusations are already emerging. As election expert Badiul Alam Majumdar has rightly noted, some level of tension is normal, but it must never spill over into violence or systematic unfairness. Preventing that outcome requires an EC willing to act decisively. Responsibility, however, does not rest with the EC alone; political parties must also refrain from unfair practices, respect environmental and legal rules for campaigning, and focus on engaging voters. The administration and LEAs too, must perform their duties impartially and professionally.

This election offers a chance to restore credibility to the country's electoral system. The EC must act with courage and impartiality to ensure that. Political parties must compete honourably, and candidates must respect both the letter and the spirit of the law. Only by doing so can we ensure that Feb 12 delivers a truly free, fair and credible election.—ANN

Imperialism in a new economic guise

By Kong Qingjiang and Chen Li

PEOPLE walk past a street sign in Nuuk, Greenland, protesting a US threat to take over the Danish territory.—Courtesy China Daily

HISTORY tends to repeat itself, even if in a different form. In 1900, an eight-country military coalition of Britain, the United States, Germany, France, Japan, Russia, Italy, and Austria-Hungary invaded China. More than 60,000 troops marched into the country to suppress the Boxer Rebellion, trampling principles of sovereignty and symbolising the logic of imperial power.

More than a century later, another grouping of eight countries has taken shape. This time, however, the intent is not to invade a weak state but to shield one from a bully. The country concerned is Denmark, which has faced escalating demands from the United States to hand over Greenland, its autonomous territory. At Denmark's invitation, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Germany and France joined what might be informally described, by historical analogy, as a new "eight-nation alliance". Ironically, 44 hours later after its deployment, the 15-people German force withdrew from Greenland.

But the contrast between the two alliances could hardly be sharper. Whereas the 1900 alliance mobilised over 60,000 troops, the current arrangement consists of a small and largely symbolic presence. It is not a military force capable of deterring an invasion. It is less a military formation than a political statement.

The trigger is the US' explicit interest in acquiring Greenland. In his latest speech in Davos, US President Donald Trump reaffirmed his determination to acquire Greenland, expressing in the unfounded excuse — since it is part of Nato — that Denmark is too weak to protect the strategically important polar island. While Washington has framed its position in strategic and security terms, the very idea of its control over territory belonging to another state raises serious legal questions. International law prohibits territorial acquisition by coercion. Denmark's sovereignty over Greenland, and Greenland's right to self-government within that framework, are not matters open to unilateral revision.

Denmark and Greenland have made it clear that they do not consent to any transfer of sovereignty. Against this backdrop, the European alignment should be understood less as a challenge to US hegemony than as a collective affirmation of a basic principle of international law: that borders and political status cannot be altered by pressure. In this sense, the new grouping operates as a symbolic defense of the post-World War II legal order, rather than as a traditional alliance.

Washington's response has underscored the asymmetry of power involved. Rather than escalating the issue militarily, the US has turned to economic instruments. Washington has threatened to use tariffs against European partners as leverage in political disputes, echoing past episodes in which trade measures were deployed to advance strategic objectives. While tariffs are legitimate tools of trade policy, their use as instruments of political coercion occupies a gray area under international law, particularly when aimed at influencing decisions relating to the sovereignty of territories.

Supporters of the US position might argue that the comparison with 1900 is misplaced. They note that Washington has not deployed troops, that its actions remain within the bounds of diplomacy and trade policy, and that Greenland's strategic importance in the Arctic justifies robust negotiations among allies. From this perspective, tariffs and political pressure are seen as legitimate tools of statecraft rather than violations of international norms.

Yet this defense highlights precisely the concern at stake. International law does not prohibit negotiation or economic competition, but it draws a clear line against coercion aimed at altering sovereign choices. When economic measures are explicitly linked to forcing a change in territorial or political status, the distinction between diplomacy and compulsion becomes blurred. The absence of military force does not eliminate the legal or normative implications.

The historical analogy between the two "eight-nation alliances" should not be overstated. Today's international system is fundamentally different from that of 1900, shaped by the United Nations Charter, the norms of sovereign equality, territorial integrity and legal constraints on the use of force. Yet the comparison remains instructive precisely because it reveals what has changed, and what has not.

In 1900, collective power was used to override the sovereignty of a weaker state. In 2026, collective alignment is being used to affirm sovereignty amid pressure from a stronger power. The reversal of roles underscores the enduring tension between power and law in international affairs.

History does not repeat itself in identical form, but it does echo. The story of the two "eight-nation alliances" illustrates a persistent question at the heart of the global order: whether international relations will be governed primarily by rules and consent, or by leverage and coercion. The answer will shape not only the fate of Greenland, but also the credibility of the international legal system designed to prevent the return of imperial politics in a modern guise. —China Daily/ANN

Second thoughts about reducing reliance on single reserve asset

By Paola Subacchi

US President Donald Trump's relentless attacks on Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, together with his destabilising foreign policy — notably the seizure of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and subsequent threats to bomb Iran and invade Greenland — have called into question the entire postwar international order, including the dominance of the dollar. There has never been a more appropriate moment to reflect on the dynamics that have kept the international monetary system relatively stable over the past half-century.

Stability has persisted despite a fundamental asymmetry inherent in the dollar's role as a global reserve currency: To supply the world with dollar liquidity, the United States must run a current-account deficit, buying more from abroad than it sells. At the same time, it issues debt that foreign governments and investors are willing to use as a reserve asset.

As a result, US borrowing costs have remained consistently low, enabling the federal government to expand its fiscal space on the back of foreign savings. As former People's Bank of China Gov. Zhou Xiaochuan observed in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, global monetary stability depends on a currency issued by a sovereign state whose policies are ultimately driven by domestic priorities. The spillovers from Trump's "America First" policies illustrate what happens when those priorities diverge from the interests of the rest of the world.

In 2009, Zhou proposed exploring a global currency decoupled from the domestic concerns of any single issuer. At the same time, he began promoting the renminbi's internationalisation. Until then, China — the world's largest exporter — had relied almost entirely on the dollar to invoice and settle its external trade. That dependence led to a massive buildup of dollar reserves, which peaked at $3.8 trillion in 2014.

Reducing reliance on the dollar and diversifying away from a single reserve asset made sense for China then, and it still does. As a large, export-driven economy, China assumes persistent risks by effectively outsourcing its payments system and savings to the US. That helps explain why Chinese holdings of US federal debt have fallen to about $700 billion from roughly $1.3 trillion in 2015.

Concerns about global imbalances — now back on the G7's agenda under France's leadership — are hardly new. They featured prominently in G20 discussions in the early 2010s, when Chinese policymakers saw a more balanced international monetary system as one that would spread adjustment burdens more evenly, reduce China's reliance on the dollar, and offer greater choice in payments and investments, thereby enhancing stability. The underlying rationale was straightforward: A systemically important economy like China should have a genuinely international currency.

Crucially, this vision rested on post-crisis policy cooperation through the G20. It was supported by multilateral financial institutions, particularly the International Monetary Fund, which encouraged the renminbi's internationalization as a way to integrate China more fully into the global economy.

The 2016 addition of the renminbi to the basket of currencies that comprise special drawing rights (the IMF's reserve asset) was seen as a step toward a multicurrency monetary system. During China's G20 presidency in 2016, such a shift was widely regarded as beneficial not only for China but also for global stability.

Over the next decade, however, that consensus largely unraveled amid rising geopolitical tensions. The prevailing view, reflected in the Center for Economic and Policy Research's latest Geneva report, is that a multicurrency system under such conditions could deepen fragmentation and exacerbate systemic risks. Without robust coordination mechanisms, currency competition can prove destabilising.

But heavy dependence on the dollar carries its own risks, especially given Trump's erratic and often transactional policymaking. With global financial stability effectively held hostage by US domestic policies, China is developing an international currency commensurate with its growing economic footprint. The case for an international monetary system that does not hinge on a single dominant currency remains as compelling today as it was a decade ago. The path forward lies in a carefully coordinated transition toward such a system. But without policy cooperation to hold it together, instability and further fragmentation are likely to follow.—The Korea Herald/ANN

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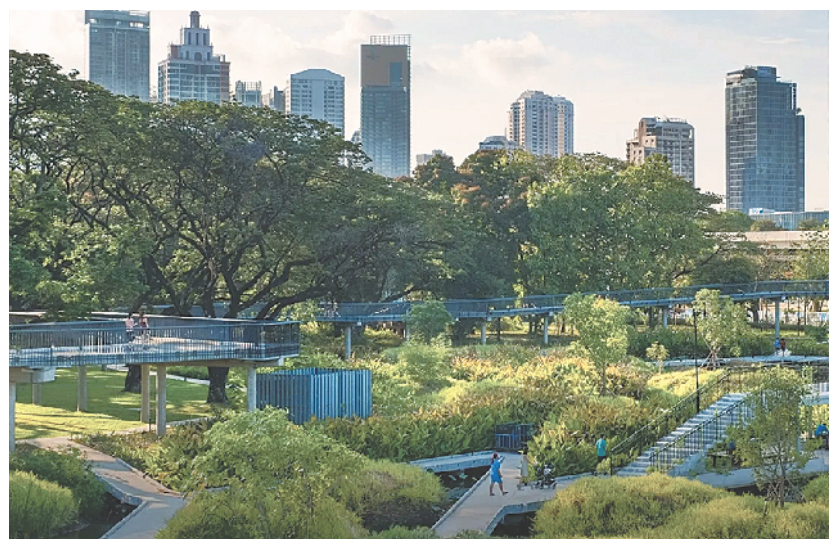
AN aerial picture shows a landslide at Pasirlangu village, West Java, Indonesia, on Sunday.—AFP



ONE of the Bangkok's most popular workout spots.—Courtesy The Nation

BANGKOK: People's Party MP Rukchanok Srinork takes photographs with supporters at a campaign rally ahead of the general election on Sunday.—AFP

From longevity to lifestyle: where Bangkok goes to work out

THAILAND'S latest health and longevity trend is reshaping daily routines, with more people prioritising holistic wellbeing, regular exercise and mindful self-care.

The growing health and longevity movement is no longer just a passing trend. It has evolved into a core lifestyle behaviour for modern Thai consumers.

According to Watsons Thailand's Customer Trend Survey (late 2025), based on responses from over 4,000 members, Thais increasingly see health as a long-term investment that pays off in quality of life — not merely an expense to fix immediate problems.

The survey found that Thai consumers are prioritising a more holistic approach to wellness — integrating physical health, mental wellbeing and lifestyle habits. Over 72pc said they value health as much as, or more than, beauty, reflecting the belief that "true beauty starts from inner balance."

Gone are the days when buying health products was seen as indulgent. Today, self-care spending is viewed as a long-term asset. Many now allocate a fixed "wellness budget" each month — just like dining or entertainment.

Over half of respondents set aside 1,000–3,000 baht per month, while one in four spends more than 3,000 baht. This marks a major shift in priorities: health is not just a trend, but a new spending essential — an investment in lifelong wellbeing.

The Garmin Connect Data Report 2025 showed an 8pc year-on-year increase in recorded fitness activities worldwide. The top five most popular sports were running, walking, cycling, strength training and cardio workouts.—The Nation (Thailand)/ANN

TOKYO: A staff restocks panda plush toys at a souvenir shop at Ueno Zoo two days before the planned return of twin giant pandas Xiao Xiao and Lei Lei to China.—Reuters

RIYADH: A visitor looks at an art piece by Pablo Picasso, displayed for auction at Sotheby's exhibition 'Origins II' in Saudi Arabia's capital city.—Reuters